

Improving Water Quality Standards Review

EPA Region 7 - Kansas City, Kansas

Geographic location or area of activity: States of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska and EPA Region 7 - Kansas City, Kansas

Description of activity: The leadership from EPA Region 7 and the state environmental agencies of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska agreed to change the nature of their working relationship and revamp processes to meet the challenge of increasing demands on limited staff and resources. The States and EPA selected the "Water Quality Standards Submittal, Review and Approval" process as their first improvement project. The method chosen is known as "Kaizen", a workplace improvement strategy that eliminates waste -- defined as "activities that consume resources but do not add value." The method takes apart a process and puts it back together in a "lean", better way. The Kaizen Team set goals and objectives, and went to work. In a week long workshop, the team designed and agreed upon a new process. Decisions made in the room were final and ready for implementation.

The new process has 24 fewer steps and reduces the time required to complete each step. The understanding that of the four States and Region 7 developed allows for the identification of strategic points where EPA's involvement in the state's water quality standards rulemaking process is critical and effective. The Kaizen process created the dialogue needed to build trust and sustain change. The Team is convinced that they will maintain the goal of "100% legally defensible approvals on time."

The project received an innovations award from ECOS in the Spring of 2007; implementation of the project as a best management practice to be replicated in other EPA Regions and States.

Interagency partners: Participating with State and EPA participants from Region 7 are representatives from EPA's national water program in Washington, D.C. and the Environmental Council of the States who piloted several organizational change techniques within their States with considerable success participated. Through the Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Relations, EPA is providing ECOS funding to support state lean information resources and future projects.